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UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000203

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SURINAME POLITICAL PARTY SNAPSHOT: PALU: THE
"TAINTED" PARTY

REF: 01 PARAMARIBO 866

SUMMARY

1. Established in 1977, the Progressive Workers and Farmers Union (PALU) is yet another marginal party trying to escape extinction in Suriname's crowded political scene. Under the leadership of party leader Iwan Krolis, the mostly Creole party of 1,000 members uses its single National Assembly seat to advocate the development of the country's agricultural and logging sectors. The party's greatest obstacle to political power is concern about the party since it was the sole political party willing to form a civilian government with the military regime immediately after the latter murdered 15 prominent opposition leaders in December 1982. Many Surinamers believe that PALU supported the murders and/or took advantage of the tragedy to gain political power. In its defense, PALU claims that the party felt compelled to re-introduce democracy to Suriname, a responsibility no other party wanted to take on after the murders. Even if voters looked past the party's ties to the military regime, the party faces an uphill battle as its one electoral district, Suriname's smallest, is expected to become a fierce battleground in the upcoming 2005 elections. End Summary.

PARTY OVERVIEW

2. With its single National Assembly seat (out of the country's 51 seats), the Progressive Workers and Farmers Union (PALU), comprised of neo-socialist intellectuals, is yet another marginalized party in Suriname that is struggling to stay alive. Led since its 1977 founding by party chairman Iwan Krolis, the predominantly Creole opposition party of 1,000 members maintains a low-profile while promoting a limited platform: development of the country's agricultural and, to a lesser extent, logging sectors.

3. During a recent conversation with the Embassy, Krolis elaborated on the party's aims, voicing support for additional government incentives to stimulate the agricultural sector (i.e., by providing cheap loans and subsidies for inputs like fertilizer and equipment.) In addition, Krolis, who is also head of the Foundation for Forest Management (SBB), advocated sustainable forestry through granting full authority to the SBB to permit the country to more effectively exploit its rich timber resources.

PALU TAINTED BY TIES TO BOUTERSE'S REGIME

4. Krolis cited PALU's involvement in the early 1980s with the military regime as the greatest obstacle to broader political support. In the party's early years, PALU remained a small, marginalized party. With the military's rise to power, Embassy sources say, the PALU saw an opportunity to gain entry to the government by supporting the military regime. By 1982, Surinamers began to clamor for the military to fulfill its 1980 pledge to return the country to civilian rule. In support of the military regime, PALU members tried to dampen those demands by warning the more vocal government critics that there might be dire consequences of openly opposing the regime.

5. After the December 1982 military regime's murder of 15 government opponents, PALU joined the military regime (in February 1983) in a coalition government leading many to conclude that PALU was at least morally complicit in the murders. PALU party leaders Iwan Krolis and Errol Alibux are included in the official list of December 1982 murder suspects; the investigation into the murders is still ongoing.

6. Alibux served as prime minister in the coalition government from February 1983 to January 1984. (Note:

Alibux later joined military strongman Desi Bouterse's NDP political party in 1997, serving as Minister of Natural Resources and Finance under the Wijdenbosch Administration. Alibux was convicted of corruption in November 2003. End Note.) The military-PALU coalition government was short lived. PALU was ousted in January 1984 in the wake of labor strikes protesting a tax hike to raise revenue after the Netherlands ceased making payments to Suriname as stipulated in the 1975 treaty granting Suriname its independence and

3.5 billion Dutch guilders (1.75 billion USD) in development assistance.

KROLIS RESPONDS TO HIS CRITICS

17. In his conversation with the Embassy, Krolis vigorously denied critics' charges that PALU had encouraged the military regime to violently quell the rising opposition. Krolis insisted that the party had only warned the public about possible drastic actions by the military prior to the tragedy. In PALU's defense, Krolis insisted that the party did not sanction the murders nor did it take advantage of the tragedy to gain political power. He maintained that the party only formed a civilian government with the military regime to help re-introduce democracy to Suriname since there were no other parties willing to step up to the plate to fulfill this important function in the wake of the murders.

18. Krolis claimed that while in office, PALU worked diligently to convince the military to work with civilians to unite the country. These efforts, he said, culminated in PALU's organization of the February 25, 1983, reconciliation day, "Brasa Dee," to bring supporters and opponents of the military together. Critics, however, dismissed the one-time event as a largely symbolic gesture that did little to calm the fears civilians harbored toward the military. Referring to the party's 1984 ouster, Krolis portrayed the party as a victim of the military regime. Despite its removal from power, PALU continued to strive for the country's political and economic development. Its work on preliminary discussions between the military regime and rebels who waged the 1987-1992 Interior War, Krolis claimed, contributed to the 1992 Accord for National Reconciliation and Development. (Note: Embassy sources dispute Krolis' version of the PALU's involvement in negotiating the 1992 Accord, maintaining that PALU made no contribution to the agreement. End Note.)

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2005 ELECTIONS

19. With its questionable ties to the Bouterse regime, as well as its limited mandate, its small size, and its lack of financial resources, PALU faces an uphill battle in the upcoming 2005 elections. In the 2000 elections, PALU captured one of two seats in Coronie, Suriname's smallest electoral district, a rural district populated mostly by Creoles and Javanese. In 2000, the PALU realized that with only 300 votes needed to win one of Coronie's two seats, the major political parties had ignored this potentially influential district. PALU focused its meager campaign funds on this small rural district, promoting its agricultural platform, easily winning its single National Assembly seat. In the upcoming 2005 elections, however, other political parties have realized the error of their ways and have already begun actively courting Coronie's voters. PALU will likely have to double its efforts if it is to retain its only National Assembly seat.

10. Regarding the party's strategy for the 2005 elections, PALU National Assembly member Anton Paal told the Embassy that the party will adhere to the game plan it followed in the 2000 elections -- it will field candidates in the three districts where the party's power base is located (Paramaribo, Wanica, and Coronie). He said that the party would like to field candidates in more, if not all, of the country's ten districts but is unable to do so due to financial constraints. At this time, there are no plans for PALU to enter into a coalition with other political parties, but Paal hinted that the party would consider teaming up with a partner, including Bouterse's National Democratic Party (NDP), if asked.

COMMENT

11. PALU remains a party haunted by its past. Although the December 1982 murders took place over two decades ago, many Surinamers direct some of their anger over the murders at PALU, while, ironically, former military strongman Desi Bouterse and his supporters enjoy significant support -- so

much so that they are the largest opposition group in Suriname. For now, PALU's main hurdle is surviving the 2005 elections; it faces an uphill battle as it tries to hold on to its one National Assembly seat in Coronie, which is expected to become a major electoral battleground in the 2005 elections. Failure to win a seat increases the

likelihood that much-maligned PALU will wither away. End Comment.

FAUCHER

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